

A Very Early Bible Society

by C.H. Spurgeon

C.H. Spurgeon passionately emphasizes the divine preservation, preciousness, and power of the Bible as God's inspired and infallible Word, urging believers to cherish, uphold, and share it faithfully.

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 34:15, 2 Chronicles 34:18, 2 Chronicles 34:19

Topics: "Divine Inspiration", "Scripture Preservation"

Description

In this devotional sermon, C.H. Spurgeon reflects on the remarkable discovery of the Book of the Law by Hilkiah and its profound significance as a testament to God's providential preservation of Scripture. Spurgeon extols the Bible as the divinely inspired, infallible Word of God that nourishes the soul and guides believers through life and eternity. He calls Christians to cherish, defend, and share this precious treasure, celebrating the work of the Bible Society in spreading the Scriptures worldwide. This sermon inspires reverence for the Bible and confidence in its enduring power.

Transcript

"And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan... Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book. And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes." 2 Chronicles 34:15,18,19.

~ON BEHALF OF THE BRITISH AND FOREIGN BIBLE SOCIETY~

HILKIAH had found THE BOOK and it was a more important find than if he had discovered a mine of diamonds, or perpetual motion, or a new world! Oh, that Book, that wonderful Book! Was there ever anything like it under Heaven? Well may it be a power when we come to think of what it is—the Book of the Law of the living God! How reverently did he lift it from its hiding place, remove its dust and commence to read its title and contents! This particular Book of the Law was probably the first five Books of Moses, commonly called the Pentateuch. Some have thought that it was only the Book of Deuteronomy, but it is too late in the day for us to decide with confidence its exact form. We know that it was "a Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses" (2 Chron 34:14), probably an autographed copy by Moses. Of that we cannot be sure, but whatever hand may have written the letters, what a Book the Law of the Lord is! The Old Testament is a Divine light which has led multitudes of saints to the Lord's right hand—and its luster is not dimmed by the New Testament, but increased thereby. Not one tittle of it has failed, or shall fail—it lives and abides forever! Taking an enlarged view of the Law of the Lord today and holding in our hands two

Testaments, both the Old and the New, what a marvelous Book the Bible is! Earth does not contain an equal wonder!

It is a Book which has God for its Author, for though there are many authors and the Book is divided into many treatises, yet it is all of one as to its innermost authorship, since holy men of old spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit. A Divine originality runs through it all—marks of the Divine Mind abound in every portion and the Holy Spirit still inspires it all and breathes it into the hearts of believing readers. Matthew and Mark, and Luke and John are here, but we scarcely observe them as compared with the higher light, the Light of God which illuminates every page! The Book is saturated with a heavenly life!

What God has written is to be received with the utmost reverence. It is a pity that so many treat this Sacred Volume as they would treat any ordinary book. They sit on the throne of judgment and sway the scepter of criticism, as if they would call God, Himself, to their bar! Surely they have never heard in their heart and conscience the sound of that question, "Who are you that repleas against God?" If God is not its Author, this Book is a gross imposture and the sooner we treat it as such the better! But if God is its Author, let us bow before it obediently and accept it as our Infallible Directory.

As it has God for its Author, so it commends itself to us as inestimably precious because it has God's mind for its matter. In this Book of the Lord the chief subject is Himself and His ways and His Grace towards us, His creatures. Here the Lord does not so much explain His works as His own personal ways, thoughts and designs to our fallen race. He does not take the pen in hand to explain to us what He has written in the stone book, or to open up to us what He has printed in letters of light in yonder constellations, but to reveal His glorious Grace which He has caused to dwell in all its fullness in Christ Jesus our Lord! He has left us to find out what we may of visible things—a happy and healthful exercise for our

minds, but He had something nobler to tell us when He inspired this Book. Herein He has told us His thoughts of man and of the Man, Christ Jesus. His thoughts upon our sin and the ruin that comes of it. His thoughts as to how we may be saved and what shall come out of that salvation. The windows of this Book look towards Heaven and truly they are windows of agate—themselves precious and giving us a view of still more precious things! Its doors open into eternity and its gates lead into Glory. Every page points to holiness and felicity and attracts us thereto. Precious Book! I would say of you what David said of Goliath's sword "There is none like that. Give it to me." You are marrow and fatness, honey, wines on the lees well-refined—yes, manna of angels and water from the Rock, Christ Jesus! Of all soul medicines you are the most potent! Of all mental dainties you are the sweetest! And of all spiritual food you are the most sustaining!

As the Book has God for its Author, and God's mind for its matter, so does it become invaluable to us because it is directed to us. It is not a letter written from God to the angels, nor is it sent to a race of beings alien from ourselves. This Book is for men and it is directed not to our curiosity, nor to any of our lower faculties, but to the soul of our life, to the vital spirit of our manhood! It is God's Word to the innermost man—to our immortal part. He speaks here not only to our ears, but to our souls. He directs His teaching not to that part of us which shall die, but to that part of us which shall never cease to be, but shall be immortal as Himself! If ever a man ought to concentrate all his faculties and pray to be in the best mental order, it should be when he comes to study the Word of God upon matters which concern his noblest being. God grant, therefore, that in our hearts we may feel deep reverence for this marvelous Book which we shall not now lose as Israel almost lost it—whose copies will never become scarce, as they were in Josiah's day. The Word of the Lord will always be precious, but not through scarcity of copies, now that

the Bible Society is scattering them thick as autumn leaves! They will always be gems for value and yet as pebbles of the brook for multitude!

He that reads this wondrous Book aright may well value it because of the blessings which it will bring him. It will tell him how to be rid of all his sin and free himself from the slavery of Satan. It will teach him how to bear his present burdens and quit all needless cares. It will be a guide to him through the maze of life, a pillow for the bed of death! It will give him joy and peace through believing when the thickest troubles shall gather round about him, and it will make him ready for the future world when brightest glories shall shine upon him! Whatever you need for time or for eternity, this Book shall either give it to you, or point you to Him who has it ready to give to you if you will bend your knee before Him! It is a golden mine of the Truth of God and infinitely more—it is a treasury of blessings and delights, and even then I have not fully described it. It has for you, O sheep of the Lord, all that your Good Shepherd sees that you have need of! Here are the green pastures wherein He makes you to feed and to lie down—and here flow the still waters, whereof if a man drinks, he shall never thirst, but shall joy and rejoice in God forever! I do not wonder that Hilkiah and Shaphan had the same value for the smaller Book which we Believers in Christ have for the larger edition of it—for even a fragment of it is priceless! I do not wonder that they considered their treasure to be worthy of being brought before the king. If they had discovered where hidden coffers had been concealed by Solomon and the great kings that succeeded him, they would not have procured so glorious a present for the king of Judah as when they suddenly stumbled upon this Book of the Law of the Lord!

I. Tonight I shall try to speak of the whole question under three heads. And the first will be this—here is an instance of that PECULIAR PRESERVATION which God has extended to the Scriptures which He has Inspired. It would seem, from this narrative, that copies of the Word of God had become extremely rare, for no other copy was known to exist. If anyone had known where there was a copy of the Pentateuch, the priest would have known, or the pious king's secretary would have been informed of it. These appear to have been gracious men, learned men—and men to whom the people came—surely if such a thing was procurable, they would have possessed a copy of the Law of the Lord. Perhaps the faithful scattered up and down through Israel and Judah had copies of the Book, but they had grown so accustomed to conceal them from their persecutors that they kept the secret to themselves. If there were other copies, they were not known to those who had the best means of discovering them.

When Hilkiah discovered this copy of the Word of God, he was greatly surprised and overjoyed. What a singular Providence it was that the Book was not quite destroyed! How fortunate that the one copy should have been left! It is believed by many—and I think that their belief is correct—that this was a standard copy. If it was not the original, yet it was an authorized transcript which was to be regarded as the correct text—and it had been laid up in the Ark of the Lord for that purpose. Perhaps in some dark hour, for fear that it would be discovered even in the secret shrine of the

tabernacle, a priest had hidden it away. The tradition is that it was buried beneath a heap of stones when Ahaz was seeking out copies of the Word to destroy them. By the Divine Providence of God this one standard copy had been preserved and now came to light! It may have been hidden carefully and then Providence had provided the caretaker. It may have been thrown away carelessly—then Providence had made even that carelessness to be the means of preserving the treasure. In any case, the Law was still among men and it had now fallen into careful and reverent hands. The God who gave it had preserved it!

Now look along through all the ages and if you are a reverent Believer in the Word, you will be filled with grateful wonder that the Sacred Roll has been preserved to us! Through what perils it has passed and yet, as I believe, there is not a Chapter of it lost—no, nor a verse of any Chapter! The misreading of the copies are really so inconsiderable and are so happily corrected by other manuscripts, that our Bible is a marvel in literature for the comparative ease with which the correct text is discoverable! It seems to me that God's Divine Care has extended itself to the whole text, so that, with far less care than would be needed by any classic author, the very words of the Holy Spirit may be known! As the wings of cherubim overshadowed the Mercy Seat, so do the wings of Providence protect the Book of the Lord! As Michael guarded the body of Moses, so does a Divine Care secure the Books of Moses! I invite lovers of history and of famous books to look into the interesting story of the immortality of Scripture. Let us think of that special preservation with reverent gratitude.

The God of Israel had given rules for the preservation of the Scriptures, but they had evidently fallen into disuse. It is expressly laid down in the Book of Deuteronomy that each king was to copy out the Book of the Law for himself. We have no evidence that any of them did so! Most of the ordinances of the Lord to His chosen people were neglected almost as soon as they were given. Even in the wilderness, during 40 years, the rite of circumcision, which lay at the base of everything, was unobserved! The feast of tabernacles was not kept for many and many a year. And the Passover, the most solemn of all rites, was not carefully celebrated—indeed, it had never been properly observed from the days of Samuel to the days of Josiah! It had been altered and debased from its original form. Alas, Christian ordinances have suffered from the same tendency to change! This proves the depraved nature of man, and his unwillingness to walk in the path of obedience. The plan of preserving the Sacred Book by the kings' copying it had fallen into disuse and, therefore, the extreme scarcity of manuscripts around the court—yet even then, the Word did not fail!

Nor was the Scripture alone in danger from the neglect to preserve it, but furious persecutions had been raised against the Holy Volume. The haters of it slew the Prophets, broke down the memorials of God's goodness to His people and polluted the Holy Place of the Most High—and their rage did not spare His statutes. The Law must be destroyed, or they would still be rebuked. You know, Brothers and Sisters, how from century to century that church which has no foundation in the Word of God has, with desperate determination, hunted after every copy of the Inspired Volume to destroy it! It is not very long ago since that unchangeable church called the Scriptures "dangerous pastures." Who and what must the shepherds be who use such language concerning the Law of the Lord? But with all their burnings, they have not destroyed the Book! With all their inquisitions and torture chambers, faith in Scripture has survived! Still the Book teaches and preaches with a Divine Unction and Authority. What Popery could not do, infidelity shall not do! Infidelity, some years ago, was going to blot out the name of Jesus from under Heaven! Its boastful champion said that he was but one man, but in a few years he would undo all that was accomplished by the 12 Apostles! His name is left to curse—the work of God goes on better than ever it did and the grand old Book is scattered everywhere, falling fast and thick as snowflakes in the time of winter! I might almost say that the copies of the Bible are in number comparable to the sands of the sea! Think of nearly a million penny Testaments being scattered in a single year in this one land! These are leaves of the Tree of Life for the healing of the nations! There is a blessing in every line of the Sacred Record both for the present age and for years to come. This Word will abide among men till time shall be no more. God be thanked for it!

The passage before us is a very beautiful instance of how under every difficulty, when every regulation has been neglected, and the utmost fury goes forth against the Word, yet the Word lives and abides forever! The fact is that Providence is the ally of Revelation. From the Word of the Lord, Creation began—by the Word of the Lord Creation is sustained and everything seems to know the source from which it came—and every creature lends itself to the preservation of that grand Word by which it exists! Depend upon it, Brothers and Sisters, the Book is not alone—God is always with it! God has put a wall of fire around the Revelation of His will and with Omnipotence He guards it against all who would harm it! God is always with those who tremble at His Word. And when there shall come times of darkness and of sorrow, and you shall hear of wars and rumors of wars, never question what the end will be, for "the Word of the Lord endures forever." He that sits on the floods as King forever and ever, will so order all things that His Word shall have yet greater sway and His Gospel shall conquer the hearts of men!

But, oh, how should we love the Book, and how should we stand up for it, and guard it jealously, since God has guarded it so well! Let every man of God be like Solomon's valiant men of Israel who watched about the bed of the king, each man with his sword upon his thigh because of fear in the night—for there is much fear just now for the Truth of God. I mean, of course, to us poor puny beings there is danger—there is no fear in the great heart of the Eternal! There is no fear as to the accomplishment of His purposes, for He is strong in power and not one fails. What our fathers preserved with their blood, we will preserve with our lives. That which bore them to a martyr's death, singing as they went, we will not consent to throw away! If any man has another gospel, let him keep it—I am satisfied with mine. If any man has found another bible, let him read it—I am satisfied with my mother's old Bible and the Bible of my ancestors. If discoveries are to be made concerning a new way of the salvation of men, let them make them who care to do so—the old way has saved me and the old way has saved multitudes of others—and therein shall I abide, God helping me, come what may! And so will you, my Brothers and Sisters—and together we will rejoice that God preserves His Book and continues to give His Holy Spirit with it! God will uphold His Truth that is in this Book and the men that hold that Truth shall be upheld. "Forever, O Lord, your Word is settled in Heaven!" And similar eternal settlements are made for all whose hope is fixed upon that Word!

II. Having glanced at this, I ask you to think for a little upon another point—THE COMMENDABLE COMMUNICATION CONCERNING THIS BOOK. Hilkiyah finds it. Hilkiyah hands it to the royal secretary, whose name was Shaphan. Shaphan reads a bit of it and makes quite sure that it is what it professes to be—and then immediately he goes with it to the king. The king holds a Bible-reading with him and when the king has read the Scared Roll, himself, he summons all the people and reads the Book to them. The point is this—if you have found the Word of God, make it known to others! Keep not this honey to yourself!

Hilkiyah handed to Shaphan the Book without note or comment. It was the Book with no apocryphal matter rolled up with it. It was the Book of the Law of God in its purest state. He who found the Book delighted in it, but he passed it on—and the next passed it on and the next passed it on—and the next circulated it still further. All the nation soon heard of what was written in the Book. The handlers of the Volume do not appear to have tarried long. Hilkiyah rejoiced and said to secretary Shaphan, "I have found the Book of the Law!" And Shaphan did not delay a month, but went straight away to let the king know. And the king, after he had tore his clothes, expressed his sorrow for national sin and enquired at the hand of the Lord's Prophetess, published the Divine message to the people and read the Law to them. The moral is—continually make known God's Holy Word! If you have obtained light, let your brother light his candle at your candle. If you have seen anything of God, tell your brother what you have seen. Let not God's Book grow moldy in your own hand, but pass it on and let another read what you have read to your

salvation and to your comfort, that he also may be saved and comforted! Let your light shine! Scatter the bread of Heaven! Distribute the balm of Gilead!

How can we do this? Well, I believe that it is the duty of every Christian man not only to preach the Gospel, and to tell to others of his own experience of it, but also literally to pass on the Book, itself. You may possibly make a mistake as to your explanation of it, but you will make no mistake if you give away the Book, itself, and pray the Spirit of God, Himself, to explain it to the reader. Money should be spent by each one of us in scattering Bibles. With Testaments at a penny, who would not give Testaments away? With Bibles so cheap as they are, and withal so beautiful to look upon, many of them, who would not think it a good investment frequently to give to the young, to your relatives, to your friends, a copy of the Book? Suit the size of the copy to the person and so give that your present will be valued. What better marriage gift than a family Bible? What better present for an aged person than one of the large-print Bibles? Oh, what gladness you might give to many a humble cottager by the present of such a Book! I have seen them with their old thumbed Bibles, trying to read them when they have strained their eyes and I have pitied them. We who are getting old know the luxury of a fine large print! You who have the means should take care that there is not an elderly person who, for lack of large type, is unable to read the Word of God! I hope that few houses are without a copy of the Word of

God—but while I hope so, I have often had my hopes very rudely dashed to the ground by discoveries of people who possess no Bible at all!

I also fear that millions who possess copies of the Word of God, never think of reading them! I have been at night, not far from here, in the houses of persons thought to be respectable—and there has been death very near and I have said, "Bring me the Bible, that I may read a passage of Scripture." And they have hunted high and low and none has been found! This was not for lack of means to buy, but for lack of care to have! It is for us, at any rate, to endeavor liberally to scatter copies of the Word of God.

You are doing this when you help the man who spends his life in the work of translation. How can there be Bibles to give away in foreign languages until the Book has been translated into them? The scholar must live while he has the work of translation to do. Subscriptions given to the Bible Society are a handing over of the Scriptures to tribes that sit in darkness—who by this means shall see a great light.

If you cannot give away Bibles, I believe you do a good work when you sell them, or give money to help to produce them cheaply. If you cannot afford a whole Bible, something is done when a portion is given away, or a Gospel is left in a cottage. You can never tell what may come of a single portion of the Word of God—yes, of a leaf of it! Instead of regretting, as I have heard some do, that Bibles are sometimes sold for waste paper, and goods are done up in them, I am glad that it should be so! I admire the enterprise of Andrew Fuller, and some others long ago, who printed hymns upon papers which were to be used in the sale of cottons and other small wares. They gave those papers to tradesmen that they might do their goods up in them. So long as the Truth of God does but travel, it does not matter how. If you can place the Bible where men may read it, who knows what may result? I knew a friend who, in purchasing his tobacco, found it done up in a passage of the Word of God—and by the perusal of that portion became a converted man! Let us not be afraid of what will become of the Book, for it is quite able to take care of itself—only let us imitate Hilkiah and Shaphan and Josiah, and make it known wherever we have the opportunity! Have you bread to eat while the multitudes are dying of hunger in the streets, and will you eat your morsel alone? Then shame on you! Is the plague mowing down its thousands, and have you medicine that can stop the disease, and do you conceal the recipe and hide the remedy in your own chest? Then shame on

you! Do you see millions going down to Hell and have you the good news of how they may escape that place of misery and enter into Glory? And will you not tell it, or will you not hand it on in the form of the Book? Then shame upon you! How is he a Christian who has no sympathy with the Bible Society? How is he a Christian who, in some shape or other, does not spread this matchless Word?

III. And now, lastly, I want to call your attention to the best thing of the whole and that is, notice THE IMPORTANT INFLUENCE OF THIS BOOK WHEN IT WAS READ.

We find that as soon as the king heard the words of the Law, he tore his clothes. First of all, he read it. The Book has no value if it is not read. Nowadays, we do not so much need Bibles as Bible-readers. Are any of you in that condition—that you would not be without a Bible in your house—and yet you never read it? Do you treat this Book as a fetish? Do you reverence words which you do not care to read? Is there some kind of witchcraft about paper and binding in a certain form? Do you think it a very pious thing to put a big Bible under your arm and march to a place of worship with it, and yet never read it? Oh, fall not into such folly! It is the reader and the one who understands the Word who gets the blessing from it! This Book is like a nut—you must crack the nut by reading and meditation—and so get the kernel, or it will not feed your soul!

Now, the first result of this Book upon the king was that he tore his clothes. How many here present, if they would but read the Word and if the Holy Spirit would bless it to them, would have to tear their hearts, if not their garments? You, my Friend, if you are not born-again, if you are not a Believer in the Lord Jesus Christ, are in such a condition that if you knew your danger, the joints of your loins would be loosened and for fearful astonishment you would be ready to fall to the ground! You are in the gall of bitterness and in the bonds of iniquity, but do not know it! You lie under the wrath of God! The curse of the Law is upon you and you do not know it—and all for lack of reading and believing what this Book would tell you—would tell you most assuredly and Infallibly! I fear there is never a congregation without a considerable number who have need to read this Book, if for nothing else, in order that they might know their real state. There is a prayer which I often pray and I venture to commend it to many here. I pray, "Lord, let me always know the worst of my case." I cannot bear the idea of being self-deceived, of fancying that I am rich and increased in goods and have need of nothing when, in God's sight, I am naked, poor and miserable! Read your Bibles, that you may be honest with yourselves—that you may not deceive by thinking that you are something when you are nothing! That is the first effect of the Word. "Oh," you say, "it would make me miserable even to read it." Very likely it would, but by such misery you would come to sure and healthful happiness. By such a disturbance you would come to a lasting and acceptable peace.

After the king had tore his garments, he then began to enquire after the God who had sent this Book. Now, notice this. If any of you have never done this, pray that you may read the Book—yes, read the more terrible parts of it as well as the more cheering portions—in such a way that, having read it, you may seek this God who thus speaks to you in loving faithfulness. Endeavor to learn of Him how you may be saved. Labor to know Him personally, for it is written, "Acquaint now yourself with God and be at peace." It is of no use to be acquainted with the Scriptures if you are not acquainted with God! You may read the Scriptures till you perish unless you see God in the glass of Scripture, for it is to Him that you must come! A personal Christ must have personal dealings with a personal sinner, or else there will be no personal salvation. And the value of the Book lies mainly in this—that it does not let you stop at itself, but it points as with a finger of light to the Cross, and with a still small voice it whispers, "There your hope lies. Look there!" The Lord Jesus takes up the cry of the Book and utters that gracious command, "Look unto Me, and be you saved, all the ends of the earth." O that you would look and live! Scatter the Bible, Christian

people, in order that it may be like a sharp two-edged sword to kill self-righteousness and that it may also be a finger of love to point sinners to the Cross of Christ!

After this happened and Josiah began to understand the Book, he entered upon a reformation. I will not say how many things in England need reformation, but certainly we need it in a great many forms—ecclesiastical, doctrinal, social, moral and political. The Bible is the greatest of reformers. You thought, perhaps, I should have applied that term to Luther, or Calvin, or Zwingli—but this is the reformer that reformed Luther! This is the teacher that instructed Calvin! This is the Prophet that fired the heart of Zwingli! While this Book is extant, error will always be in danger of overthrow. An open Bible, and men may quibble and criticize, and invent new doctrines if they please—but this is the Rock on which they will split. As God lives, His Truth must live! And all that is of man's imagining and scheming, and that comes not out of this Book shall be broken to pieces! The grass withers, but the Word abides. "Whoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder." If you seek to have the social fabric purged of the leprosy which now eats into its very walls, scatter this Book! If you want to uplift the fallen and to purify the defiled, scatter this Book that men may be cleansed by it! If you want to see the Church of God made one and her various dividing errors put away, scatter this Book! If you desire to see a blessed unity in the Truth, scatter this Book! If you would dispense a perfect blessing, scatter the Bible, for all good lies here! We need no novel teachings to restore the Glory of the Church—we only need to come back to the purity of Scripture! That great Reformation which broke down all the idols in Judah and Israel came of the discovery of this Book! And there remains for us at this day no better means of reform and revival! God send to England this choice mercy, that it may become a Bible-reading nation, a Bible-loving nation, a Bible-obeying nation—and that shall be the best thing that can happen to our native land. God grant it!

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON: 2 CHRONICLES 34:14-33.

Verse 14, 15. And when they brought out the money that was brought into the house of the LORD, Hilkiah the priest found a Book of the Law of the LORD given by Moses. And Hilkiah answered and said to Shaphan the scribe, I have found the Book of the Law in the house of the LORD. And Hilkiah delivered the book to Shaphan. This was a very remarkable find. Of all the discoveries that they might have made, they could have discovered nothing that would work so much good to all the people as this "Book of the Law of the Lord given by Moses."

16-19. And Shaphan carried the book to the king, and brought the king word back again, saying, All that was committed to your servant, they do it And they have gathered together the money that was found in the house of the LORD, and have delivered it into the hand of the overseers, and to the hand of the workmen. Then Shaphan the scribe told the king, saying, Hilkiah the priest has given me a book And Shaphan read it before the king. And it came to pass, when the king had heard the words of the Law, that he tore his clothes. Such was his horror upon discovering how they

had all sinned and how many terrible judgments were to be inflicted upon them because of all that long time of sin, that he tore his clothes.

20, 21. And the king commanded Hilkiah, and Ahikam the son of Shaphan, and Abdon the son of Micah, and Shaphan the scribe, and Asaiah a servant of the king's, saying, Go, enquire of the LORD for me, and for them that are left in Israel and in Judah, concerning the words of the book that is found. Oh, that all who read God's Book now would do as young Josiah did! If there is any difficulty in a book, the short way

to get to understand it is to enquire of the author. And, surely, never is there greater wisdom than having read any of the deep mysteries or solemn threats in this Volume and feeling ourselves staggered by them, we enquire of the Lord concerning them! I believe that there is many a puzzling passage in the Bible on purpose that we may be driven to enquire of the Lord about it. If the Book were all so easy of understanding that at the first reading of it, we could comprehend all its meaning, we might, perhaps, stay away from God—but He has purposely given us many dark sentences and made the sense to be somewhat obscure in order that we may wait upon His enlightening Spirit and so obtain instruction, for the Spirit of God is more useful to us even than the Word itself is! Great as the blessing of the Book is, the blessing of the living Spirit is still greater and anything is good that drives us to Him. That which had influenced the mind of Josiah was the terror of the Book.

21-28. For great is the wrath of the LORD that is poured out upon us, because our fathers have not kept the word of the LORD, to do after all that is written in this book. And Hilkiah, and they that the king had appointed went to Huldah the prophetess, the wife of Shallum the son of Tikvath, the son of Hasrah, keeper of the wardrobe, (now she dwelt in Jerusalem in the college), and they spoke to her to that effect. And she answered them, Thus says the LORD God of Israel, Tell you the man that sent you to me, Thus says the LORD, Behold, I will bring evil upon this place, and upon the inhabitants thereof, even all the curses that are written in the book which they have read before the king of Judah: because they have forsaken Me, and have burned incense unto other gods, that they might provoke Me to anger with all the works of their hands; therefore My wrath shall be poured out upon this place, and shall not be quenched. And as for the king of Judah, who sent you to enquire of the LORD, so shall you say unto him, Thus says the LORD God of Israel concerning the words which you have heard, because your heart was tender, and you did humble yourself before God, when you heard His words against this place, and against the inhabitants thereof, and humbled yourself before Me, and did tear your clothes, and weep before Me, I have even heard you, also, says the LORD, Behold, I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace, neither shall your eyes see all the evil that I will bring upon this place, and upon the inhabitants of the same. So they brought the king word again. When God selects an instrument for His own service, how well He tunes it for the use to which it is to be put! Here is a woman, a married woman, and she is selected to be the Lord's Prophetess to the king—but never has any man spoken more bravely than she did. Her opening words show a holy courage which is lifted above all fear of men—"Thus says the Lord God of Israel, Tell you the man that sent you to me," for before God kings are only men and though Huldah was only a subject of Josiah, see with what real dignity God's ordination had invested her. Josiah was not to succeed in the reformation of Israel. He was true and sincere, but the people were steeped in hypocrisy, formality and idolatry—and they did not go with the king in all his root and branch reforms. They still clung in their hearts to their idols and, therefore, they must be destroyed and the nation must be carried away captive. It was, however, a very singular promise that God gave to Josiah—"I will gather you to your fathers, and you shall be gathered to your grave in peace." Yet he was mortally wounded in battle, so how could that promise be fulfilled? You know how it could be! However we may die—if sword or plague or fire consume the saints among the rest of mankind—their very deaths and graves are blessed! There was no fighting about Josiah's grave—he was buried in peace. Pharaoh-Necho had killed him, but he did not destroy the land—and Josiah was allowed to be buried amid the great lamentations of a people who only began fully to appreciate him when he was taken away from them!

29, 30. Then the king sent and gathered together all the elders of Judah and Jerusalem. And the king went up into the house of the LORD, and all the men of Judah, and the inhabitants of Jerusalem, and the priests, and the Levites, and all the people, great and small: and he read in their ears all the words of the

Book of the Covenant that was found in the house of the LORD. That was a grand Bible-reading, with a king for reader and all his princes and all his people gathered to listen to the Word of God! What could he have said better, had he been the greatest of orators? To read out of this blessed Book must surely be to the edification of the hearers.

31-33. And the king stood in his place, and made a covenant before the LORD, to walk after the LORD, and to keep His commandments, and His testimonies, and His statutes, with all his heart, and with all his soul, to perform the words of the Covenant which are written in this Book. And he caused all that were present in Jerusalem and Benjamin to stand to it. And the inhabitants of Jerusalem did according to the Covenant of God, the God of their fathers. And Josiah took away all the abominations out of all the countries that pertained to the children of Israel and made all that were present in Israel to serve, even to serve the LORD their God. And all his days they departed not from following the LORD, the God of their father

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